

Press release:

***'Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms'*, an exhibition and workshops programme by artist Ami Clarke, in partnership with Friends of the Earth, Digital Art Studios, Sonic Arts Research Centre and PS² (Belfast), and Banner Repeater (London)**

Introductory film presentation:

Wednesday 21 May - Saturday 31 May 2025

Workshops - Saturday 31 May:

1pm - 3pm - collective writing with Friends of The Earth NI

3.15pm - 5.15pm - sonic ritual workshop with John D'Arcy and Hive Choir

Exhibition and workshops:

Thursday 7 August: exhibition launches (Late Night Art Belfast)

Friday 29 August: collective writing and sonic ritual workshops

Saturday 27 September: exhibition closes

'Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms' explores ways of 'sensing' Lough Neagh at a microbial scale, from a multi-species perspective.

'Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms'

In the long hot summer of 2023, Lough Neagh became overwhelmed with algae blooms to such an extent that the vibrant green images of the blue green algae went viral, making international headlines. Once a site of great abundance, supplying (as it still does) 40% of all drinking water to NI, and fishing a-plenty, with eel fishing famously being passed down through generations over centuries. The complexity of how the Lough became eutrophic presents a textbook case in converging dynamics of power, influence, and conflicts of interest, that have also developed over decades, if not centuries, around Lough Neagh and the watershed. Algae blooms offer a symptom of the climate crisis that emphasises the interconnectedness of vulnerable ecosystems with man-made systems.

Shifting perspectives to the microbial scale

The evolutionary biologist, Lynn Margulis' work shows that algae blooms also speak of deep, geological, planetary timescales, as cyanobacteria (blue green algae) brought oxygen to the

atmosphere at a crucial stage in evolution about 2.4 billion years ago, bringing about mass speciation and eventually humans.

Video and audio captured by the artist Ami Clarke expand upon her previous work on complex systems, informed by a collective writing project with Friends of the Earth NI. In this atmospheric video, ecological systems enmesh with human systems established over the last century, informed by a very particular world view derived from mechanistic science that considered nature purely as a resource. The deep resistance felt towards Margulis' teachings on symbiosis and cross-species collaborations, was no coincidence, with the emphasis on 'the individual' writ large in ideas of the 'selfish gene', that characterised both neo-Darwinism, and neo-liberalism, also emerging at that time.

The microbial scale also provides an important material perspective where it can be said, irrefutably, that there's simply too much phosphorus in Lough Neagh. At which point the likelihood of more algae blooms becomes inevitable. Whilst this is unwelcome news, it also offers an opportunity to dismantle everything that brings about such a deep imbalance to such a vital and vibrant ecosystem that is Lough Neagh.

As the evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis would say,
as she commented on the 'thought collective' of her time:
it doesn't have to be this way!

Workshops

Meeting The Lough On Its Own Terms has been informed by a collectively written multi-species text over the last year, contributed to by many friends and associates of Friends of the Earth NI, concerned with the lough's wellbeing.

This is an open invitation to join two further workshops on **Saturday 31 May**:

1pm - 3pm - collective writing with Friends of The Earth NI

Collective writing workshop thinking through the many stories that run through Lough Neagh, that settle like sediment, constantly shifting, only to settle again - from a multi-species perspective

3.15pm - 5.15pm - sonic ritual workshop with John D'Arcy and Hive Choir

A polyphonic sonic ritual developed from the collective writing project, with John D'Arcy of HIVE Choir and QUB's Sonic Arts Research Centre.

Sonic Ritual Workshop: John D'Arcy and HIVE Choir

The sonic ritual vocalises the collectively authored text, through song and chanting, with John D'Arcy and HIVE Choir. We will be thinking about how rituals have acted historically, as technological interfaces scoring human and non-human relationships, in very particular ways. We will be thinking about the ways that ritual might become a chant, as part of the new technology we are building. And how human voice/s in a polyphonic approach might sit within this delicate ensemble, to reflect the new calibration we are hoping to bring about.

XR Group workshop: Digital Arts Studios

The collective writing project is also informed by questions developed by Ami Clarke and Richard Davis, working with members of the XR Lab at Digital Arts Studios, expanding upon how technology can provide alternative ways of 'sensing the lough' in important ways. These considerations, in turn, inform an ongoing project, asking us to let our imagination run wild in thinking about how a multi-species approach might constitute AI differently.

In conjunction with the work on display at PS², materials will also be made available at Banner Repeater, London, opening up the conversation further, for future contributions, with invited guests.

About the artist:

Ami Clarke is a visual artist specialising in addressing the complexities of climate change through immersive and sensorial art forms. Their practice spans film, video, sculpture, and sound, often integrating game engines, VR, CGI, and 3D modelling to create multi-dimensional experiences in both real and virtual environments. Their work explores ways of living with complexity and uncertainty, drawing out interdependencies across finance, the environment, and ideological apparatus such as neoliberalism, from a critical xeno-feminist post-human position. What that means is there is an emphasis on grasping something of the complexity of the multi-temporalities and scales, cross-species contaminations and alliances, necessary to confront the environmental challenges ahead - within an evolving awareness of power relations, which necessarily take into account colonial histories as well as neo-colonial

extractions of value. They have a long-held interest in the tensions to be found between code and language, DNA and bio-semiotics, with textual productions coming of assemblages that include humans, machine learning, AI and the planet, from a multi-species approach.

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Acknowledgements

The ongoing collective writing project and diagramming sessions have been running for over a year, with contributions from the following people: John D'Arcy (Sonic Arts Queens University Belfast), James Orr (Friends of the Earth), Dr Thomas L Muinzer (Queen's University Belfast. Author of UK's Climate Change Act: Climate and Energy Governance for the UK Low Carbon Transition: The Climate Change Act 2008 (Palgrave: UK, 2018), Les Gornall (Co-Founder International Environment Forum Oct 1997 - Present, Consultant | D.Phil, BSc.(Hons), CBiol, FRSB) David Jewson – Director of Limnology Lab, Lough Neagh. University of Ulster, School of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Save Our Shores, Love Our Lough, Surfers Against Sewage, Collette Stewart (Friends of the Earth), Deborah McLaughlin (Friends of the Earth), Declan Allison (Friends of the Earth), Jane Morrow (PS²), Davy Mahon (PS²), Simon Wood (Ravenhill Films), Shauna Corr (Journalist), Tommy Green (Journalist), Catherine Devlin (Digital Arts Belfast), Richard Davis (Digital Arts Belfast).